

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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DOUBLEDAY'S CHILDREN.

BY DUTTON COOK,

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE," "HOBSON'S CHOICE," &c. &c.

BOOK I. THE NARRATIVE OF BASIL DOUBLEDAY.
CHAPTER XIII. A PROFESSOR OF ELOCUTION.

I DON'T know how it was, but while Mr. Hooton spoke we all remained very still, listening to what he said. Not that it was much real consequence to us what he said, or left unsaid; but no other course seemed open to us. We listened with a patience and attention that were, perhaps, rather absurd, all things considered. For I had a great deal to say to my father; and so had Nick; and so, I think, had Mr. Grisdale; and, no doubt, in his turn, my father had something to say to us. But Mr. Hooton certainly had impressed us all. Mr. Grisdale, I noted, gazed at him with a sort of amazed curiosity. Mr. Hooton was evidently gratified by the involuntary homage contained in our rapt and silent staring at him.

"Yes," he resumed, expressing acquiescence in some imaginary observation, for no one had spoken, "I was but now saying to my friend Mr. Doubleday, we have really here a very wide field of study. The passions, I may say, are for ever before us, in all their infinite variety. What special sentiment, let me ask, is now animating us, as we sit here in this poor and somewhat confined chamber? Nothing very violent or extravagant. No, certainly not. That we gladly leave to others. But—Tranquillity: best expressed by complete composure of face, body, and limbs; the countenance frank and bland; the brow smooth; the mouth partly open,

tending, indeed, towards a smile; the eyebrows gently arched; the eyes passing with an easy motion from object to object, but not dwelling long anywhere."

As he spoke Mr. Hooton grimaced—I can use no other word, in correspondence—as he fancied, with his description of the aspect of tranquillity.

"And then, of course, we hope. At the bidding of Hope the whole face is illumined; the eyes sparkle; the mouth starts open; the body bends forward; the arms outspread, with fingers parted as though to receive and embrace some beloved object. Desire even exaggerates these characteristics. We bend still more forward, our eyebrows are lifted higher, the mouth opened wider; we smile, I may say, extravagantly; the tone of voice becomes supplicating and yet cheery; unless, indeed, distress accompany desire, when a certain plaintiveness should prevail. The speech should be rapid and yet distinct. Sometimes, perhaps, we may decline from Hope to Fear—for nature is very fallible—passing through, we will say, the stages of Perplexity or Anxiety, Vexation, and, perhaps, even Shame. The eyebrows are drawn down; the head hangs upon the breast; the eyelids are pinched close. Then suddenly the whole body is violently agitated; there is an inclination to walk about hurriedly, to stop abruptly. The looks and gestures should denote restlessness and uneasiness; the arms should be now calmly gathered upon the breast, now extended impatiently; the hand from time to time covers the eyes or rubs the forehead. When the feeling of Shame is intense, the face is averted from the beholder; the eyes are fixed upon the ground, the brows are dragged down, and the accents falter."

Mr. Hooton, in a very remarkable way, suited his actions to his words. His features moved, his facial muscles twitched strangely, and he permitted himself very excited movements of both body and limbs. I found it difficult to restrain my laughter. To Nick the spectacle did not present itself in so ludicrous a light. He sat stolidly gazing at the performer as though he had been a dancing-dog, whose feats were surprising, and yet rather contemptible all the same.

Mr. Hooton's self-satisfaction was supreme, however. He seemed very full, indeed, of admiration of himself; he smacked his lips with enjoyment of the tones of his own voice, as though they left the taste of wine in his mouth; he rejoiced in what he held to be the grace, the alertness, and appropriateness of his gestures. When he stretched out his hand he seemed to watch it fondly, noting its charms of form and action, and the flash of the rings decking its fingers. As he spoke, his tongue had a droll way of appearing suddenly to moisten his lips so that his utterance might be glib and voluble, and then of vanishing just as promptly. In the pauses of his address to us, which was really very much of a lecture, he smiled blandly, self-applaudingly, with half-closed eyes; toyed with his shirt-frill; agitated his upraised coat-tails; and moved his thin legs to and fro.

Presently, after a light, artificial, wholly unnecessary cough, he continued:

"Or say we give way to Anger—as why should we not? For, as I before observed, I think, we are but human nature—poor human nature—and very prone to err. Say then a generous rage possesses us. The neck is stretched out, the head pushed forward, nodding and swaying in a threatening way, at the object rousing our passion; the forehead is lined with wrinkles; the eyes roll and stare under heavy, lowered brows; the nostrils are widely distended; the mouth is open wide—I may say, from ear to ear—showing the teeth in the act of gnashing; the breast heaves, breathing is difficult; every muscle is on the strain; the whole body is violently agitated; the feet stamp, and the fists are clenched. A very fine thing is Anger. And then Melancholy, tending to Despair: the lower jaw dropped, the lips pallid, the cheeks hollow, tears in the dim half-closed eyes, the voice weak, the words dragged out rather than uttered, and broken by sighs and groans. Or say we

go mad—mad as King Lear—with rolling eyes, with foaming lips, with every feature distorted; the voice now screaming, now whining; every action fierce and furious. Even rant—which as a rule I would always counsel you to avoid—even rant of the very wildest description, I have the best authority for saying, is quite permissible when Madness is in question, or such a character as Lear is being impersonated.

"I hope my young friends have followed me," Mr. Hooton resumed, after a very necessary pause, for his exertions had told upon him. He surveyed Nick and myself inquiringly with peering eyes. "We need raw material, of course, good raw material—that is indispensable." His manner implied that he regarded us in the light of raw material—a view of us which I could see that Nick, for his part, was disposed to resent. "But if we can do nothing without sound raw material, what, let me ask, can raw material do without us? Nothing, absolutely nothing. No, we must join our forces. Art must combine with Nature. Cultivation, science, practice, industry—how very essential are these! A good voice is much, but it is an instrument hardly to be played upon without knowledge of its resources, without skill to touch upon its right notes at the right moments, without sense of harmony, appreciation of tone and sentiment. A good figure is much, but if its actions are ungainly, if it is stiff in the joints, if it falls into unpicturesque postures, what does it avail? And we can do something with a bad figure—we can greatly assist contours and amend the defects of form. You would be really surprised if I were to tell you—which I shall not do, for it would be a breach of confidence—the number of false calves, not to name other fictions of like kind, now pervading the streets of this great city. If my young friends, who have listened so patiently and attentively to my remarks, would desire illustration and practical exemplification of the same, I think I could put them in the right way to obtain valuable instruction of that nature. I would bid them in the first place study the delightful ode of Collins, 'When music, heavenly maid, was young,' and so forth. As expressive of the sentiment of Joy, let them learn by heart Castalio's fine speech in *The Orphan*, beginning, 'Where am I? Surely Paradise is around me!' Fear—Agitation—Terror—they may find in great

abundance in *The Castle Spectre*. For Love they will turn naturally to their *Romeo and Juliet*. For Jealousy, to *Othello*, of course. They will study Ambition in *Richard the Third*. Guilt and Remorse in *Macbeth*. They would, perhaps, find the passions and states of feeling I have enumerated quite sufficient to begin with. But of course there are many more to be portrayed and interpreted in due season."

"An actor, may I ask?" interposed Mr. Grisdale suddenly.

"No, sir; not an actor. I should not so describe myself. I am rather the creator of actors—their guide, friend, instructor, and benefactor. Nor do I confine my labours to the amendment and enlightenment of the mimic world. I have a larger constituency; my task takes wider dimensions. Sir, it is not too much for me to say that I have educated bishops. But for the pains I have taken with them their blessings would, oratorically regarded, have been of inferior worth. I have taught the judge upon the bench how to pronounce judgment. I have instructed the advocate how to plead in court. I may safely say that I have faithfully served both church and state, bench and bar, the pulpit, and the stage. Nor have I neglected the general community. If, by any chance, you had been afflicted with a stammer—"

"Sir, I am not afflicted with a stammer," said Mr. Grisdale fiercely.

"Just so. But if you had been, sir, I could have cured you. Not a trace of it should have remained. That is a portion of my professional mission. I eradicate all impediments of that kind. I undertake to cure completely all stammers, stutters, hesitations of speech. I have never been known to fail; and my advice has been sought in regard to most extraordinary and seemingly desperate cases. I have, I do assure you, a most wonderful collection of vouchers, certificates, and testimonials from all classes of society—the highest as well as the lowest—relative to the complete success of my system; for it is a system, of course, and in its results it is quite unfailing. Speech is a science, an art. You may take it to be a natural gift; it is really nothing of the kind. I am not speaking of merely animal noises—the grunts and groans, the mutters and murmurs, which are but too commonly regarded as speech. No doubt, something of the business of life might be carried on by such means; something of our wants and desires can be in such wise made

known. But speech as a means of musical expression; speech as a power, an influence, as a method of persuading, convincing, impressing, exhorting; speech to be audible from a distance—to reach the ears of a large assembly—you must come to me to be taught speech of that kind. A very few lessons would suffice. I teach the art of public speaking—extempore or otherwise—and whether addressed to large or small congregations."

"I am myself a public speaker—something of the kind," said Mr. Grisdale.

"Pardon me, I think not," Mr. Hooton observed, closing his eyes and smiling amicably.

"Well, I've long been in the habit of addressing large meetings and crowds."

"And they did not hear you?"

"They did hear me. They applauded me to the echo."

"Yes; they saw that you were speaking, and guessed that you were saying something they would approve of, if they could only hear you."

"They were carried away by what I said; they were stirred, heart and soul, to their very depths. They agreed with every word I said."

"Yes, yes; a common delusion. But they did not, in truth, hear you."

"How do you know? You were not there."

"No, certainly, I was not there. And, I would not have my remarks understood in a personal sense, as pointed at an individual. But I have been to such meetings as you have referred to; I have—not heard—but seen speakers addressing such assemblies. They had the action of windmills, the aspect of madmen, but no articulate sound reached my ears, only now and then an intermittent confused noise, like the barking of a distant dog. Depend upon it, my dear sir—I would say it without offence—your speeches have been very much of that kind."

"You are mistaken, sir. You will give me leave to say, sir, that you are very greatly mistaken, sir. I have addressed, as I have said, public meetings on the largest scale. You tell me they did not hear me. I take the liberty of saying that you talk nonsense when you tell me that. Sir, I have seen, I have felt my audience thrill under my words. As a horse shrinks and quivers, or starts and rears impetuously when the lash descends upon his flanks, so have my hearers been stirred, and roused, and excited, as my stinging sentences, my

strong language fell upon them. Sir, I don't speak by rule and measure. I care little for arts, and sciences, and schools, and systems. I trust to nature. I speak from my heart, as my own feelings prompt me. I hope to move the hearts, to touch the feelings of others by making myself their spokesman, by embodying, as it were, their sentiments, by giving them shape, and substance, and expression. Don't tell me, sir, that I'm not heard!"

Mr. Grisdale had been struck in a tender place. He was a little vain of his powers, of his success, as an orator. He had raised his voice, and delivered himself with considerable force.

"Very good, very good indeed," said Mr. Hooton with an approving, even an applauding smile. "You will allow me to say, sir, that you surprise me. I never heard—I really never did hear in the whole course of my experience—better speaking of an untutored kind. It was rough, but it was strong; crude, but effective. But always keep your lips moist, my dear sir, and don't forget to raise your voice well at the commas. I noticed that you are apt to let it drop—a common but very mistaken practice; keep it up as though you were throwing your last word high in the air, and you'll be heard at a distance, but not otherwise. And study the mellifluous. And polish, my dear sir—polish; we are nothing without polish. Give each vowel its proper quantity. Pronounce the liquids l, m, n, forcibly always; and be distinct, and learn the value of pause and emphasis. As a rule pitch the voice low, raise the tone as you proceed, and acquire the correct method of swelling the notes; always be careful of the rising and falling inflections of the voice; and do—please do—keep watch over your gestures. For they're wild—they're really very wild, monotonous, ungainly, and wrong; oftentimes they're very, very wrong. Still, sir, you will permit me to state without reserve or hesitation that you have really about you what I may call the making of a fine speaker; and, in good hands—I freely avow my opinions—in good hands and in good time, you will do, sir, you will go far, in pulpit, or forum, at the bar, or on the stage."

"Sir," said Mr. Grisdale, with some impatience, "you dwell too much upon mere manner. I care infinitely more for matter."

"Excuse me, but really I should know—I have devoted my life to this question—and, manner is everything."

"Sir, I care only for what I am saying." "You should care more, a great deal, for how you say it."

They looked at each other in rather a glaring way. Mr. Grisdale was disposed to be angry. Mr. Hooton wore a smile of triumphant self-satisfaction. But they agreed to drop the subject of debate and close the discussion. With many ceremonious bows Mr. Hooton took leave of us. Before departing he presented each of us with one of his cards.

CHAPTER XIV. CAGED BIRDS.

My father spoke highly of Mr. Hooton. He considered himself fortunate in having such a man for his fellow-prisoner, his "chum," the sharer of his shabby room. For they had but this one room between them; and two battered and bruised-looking chiffoniers, or wardrobes, of painted wood, were at night converted into their beds; a washing-stand was secreted in a cupboard, to the door of which was fixed a jack-towel.

My father had a high opinion of Mr. Hooton's abilities as an elocutionist. Mr. Grisdale pronounced him a quack. My father shook his head. Mr. Hooton might dwell too much upon his hobby, his profession, or whatever he might choose to call it—might urge too far the principles he advocated, and over-estimate the value of his system of instruction. Nevertheless, there was a great deal in what he had said, and he was himself sincere and in earnest. So my father stated his opinion. And he confessed that he had acted in correspondence with this view, and was taking lessons in elocution of his fellow-captive. He held the art of public speaking to be a very useful art. No man could say when he might, or might not, be called upon to address a public assembly. It was a good thing to know how best to make oneself heard, how to pitch one's voice, and so on.

"Especially if you've anything to say that's worth hearing," observed Mr. Grisdale.

"That, of course," said my father. "And at some time of his life there must, I take it for granted, occur to every man something that it might be worth his while to impart, aloud, to his brother-men."

Mr. Grisdale thought this highly probable. Indeed, the statement was so forbearing, and qualified, that it could hardly have been questioned. And Mr. Grisdale approved of the expression, "brother-men." He was in the habit of using it himself.

"I find myself improving very much in Hooton's hands," said my father. "I have upon his advice been practising myself in Othello's fine speech to the senate. It was always a favourite thing of mine. I always thought there was a great deal in it. But I was not aware, really, of the effect that might be given it by elocutionary art. The quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius, too—I've tried that with Hooton; of course I'm not a fair match for him. He has more volume of tone, and is far more practised in the use of his voice; he quite bears me down, indeed, with his superior power. But I improve—I certainly improve."

My father talked on in his quiet genial way of his elocutionary studies. His smile, if a little careworn now, was still very pleasant. His eyes seemed less bright, and of a dimmer blue; but possibly the heavy air of the prison had clouded his spectacles. He hummed his little snatches of songs in his customary way, if less frequently than of old. He patted me on the head; his hand rested on Nick's shoulder; he was as gentle and tender with us as ever. He had never spoken a harsh word to us. He was incapable of a harsh thought of us, or of anyone.

Mr. Grisdale turned to look from the window—at the gravelled area below—at the racket-court on the right. Perhaps he thought my father had something of a private and confidential nature to communicate to his children. But this was not the case, apparently.

He stood by the fireplace, drawing us towards him caressingly.

Mechanically, for lack of better occupation, I was reading over and over again Mr. Hooton's card, which ran:

"Toomer Hooton, Professor of Elocution, Oratory, and the Art of Speech. Stammering effectually cured. Impediments, labial or lingual, permanently removed. The Voice cultivated. Rhetoric, in six easy lessons. Candidates for the Stage instructed and prepared for the Histrionic Profession. Theatrical engagements secured for finished pupils. Clergymen, Barristers, and others perfected in the Art of Public Speaking. Strict secrecy may be relied upon. The Highest Testimonials. Terms moderate."

My father was looking, leaning over my shoulder as I read. I could feel that he was trembling. Presently a tear fell upon my hand holding the card. He pressed upon me heavily. I was seriously alarmed. I thought he would have fallen, and I

turned the better to support him. He soon recovered himself, however.

"What's this man—Hooton is his name?—what is he here for?" Mr. Grisdale inquired.

"He tells me that his pecuniary affairs are in a very disordered state," my father answered, simply.

Mr. Grisdale laughed. "Isn't that the case with every one contained within these walls?"

"Just so. But Hooton's case seems to me especially complicated. I can't say I think that he is likely to obtain his liberty very immediately."

It was the way with each prisoner, while deeming his own release as sure of occurring very speedily, to regard the liberation of his fellow-captives as a most unlikely event. Probably I did not note this characteristic of prison-life at the time of which I am narrating, however.

"It seems that he took a theatre. Chiefly, I think, with a view to his own performance of important characters. He says, however, that he greatly desired to encourage a taste for Shakespeare, and the poetic drama in general, among the masses. The enterprise was not attended with the success that had been expected, and could have been wished. And then Mr. Hooton became connected with what are called accommodation bills."

"I have heard of such things," said Mr. Grisdale.

"And then, I understand, there is an additional embarrassment; in point of fact, a lady in the case. She says he promised her marriage. He says he didn't. The jury thought he did. He admits that, had she possessed the income he at one time supposed her to possess, he should have waived all objection, and in point of fact have made her Mrs. Hooton. But it seems her means were very limited, and, as he had none whatever, he decided that a union with her would not be prudent. No doubt he was right there. However, after hearing the case, and reading his letters, the jury found for the lady, awarding her damages, by way of compensation for her disappointment."

"It was liberal of the jury; but juries are liberal, with other people's money. Could she really have been disappointed? I can't say I think she lost much."

"Hooton is considered an engaging and attractive man. At least so I'm told."

"Did he tell you so, may I ask?"

"Not in those terms, precisely. But I

gathered as much from his conversation. He has buried three wives already. That tells a tale, you know."

"A terrible tale."

"Didn't you notice the three wedding-rings—his wives' rings—upon his little finger?"

"Poor ladies! They were simply talked to death, it's my belief. I don't wonder at his being a widower three times over. That he ever came to be a husband surprises me. Still more do I marvel, that a woman ever sued him for not making her his wife."

"Don't be unjust to him," said my father. "Perhaps he is a bore; but he's rather a nice man too. One must be tolerant, especially in such a place as this."

"Oh, certainly. We must be tolerant, here and everywhere I hope."

"And I might have a worse chum."

"That is possible, of course."

"He amuses me, and he interests me; and I really think there's a great deal in what he says."

"There's a great deal of it, there should be something in it," murmured Mr. Grisdale.

"One has to guard against idleness, moreover, in The Bench. I try hard not to be idle. There is so much evil in idleness. And so I have become one of Mr. Hooton's pupils—Professor Hooton he prefers to be called. And I pursue my own profession, in a measure. Of course I have no notion of giving that up. This is a design I was employed upon only yesterday. It's in the rough at present, but you'll soon catch my idea." As he spoke he produced from the table-drawer several sheets of paper covered with lines, diagrams, plans, and drawings. "It's very simple, the simplest thing in the world."

"At this moment I don't quite see"—began Mr. Grisdale.

"A new Bench!" explained my father. "I take the present area of the building, because I assume that Government would be indisposed to make any large grant of land. So the notion's thoroughly practical you will perceive. The alterations, or rather the new edifices I propose, might cost a million perhaps, not more—or say a million to a million and a half—and that's but a trifle, you know, when you can obtain such a building as this for it. Looks like a scene in King John, doesn't it? You see there is a deep moat beyond the exterior wall. Over this drawbridge, and under a portcullis, you approach the house of the governor or marshal. Quite a baronial residence, you observe. Here I would have

a warder sitting throughout the day, blowing his horn to announce the coming of visitors or strangers. Here should be a bowling-green, garden, and 'pleasance' for the amusement and exercise of the garrison—the prisoners, in point of fact. This is the keep, the stronghold of the prison, where the refractory should be confined; and here what is professedly a watch-tower, of extraordinary elevation: in truth, a building for the recreation of the prisoners. From its summit they would obtain a remarkable view; they would see, indeed, supposing my calculations to be correct, into no fewer than eleven English counties. They would enjoy pure sunshine and fresh air, merely by mounting a few flights of stairs. The general health of the prison would be thus very much improved. How does the thing strike you now? Please be candid."

"It strikes me as exceedingly original and ingenious."

"I'm very glad you think so. My chief object was to show you and my dear boys here that I had not been idle; that even in this dismal place I had preserved all my old industrious habits. For there's really nothing like industry."

THE POOR GENTLEWOMEN OF ST. CLEMENT'S.

IN SIX PARTS. PART II.

It was an understood thing among the gentlewomen of Dame Dorothy's Endowment that each of them had, or was supposed to have, a private income of her own, in addition to the monthly stipend to which she was entitled. I am afraid that now and then a case occurred in which such private income was more supposititious than real. Miss Anstruther, for instance, was very clever at embroidery and various kinds of needlework. It was well known to all of us that she worked with her needle in secret—early in the morning and late at night—and that the articles so made by her were sent to Muncastle for sale. But such knowledge was always ignored by us. Had she endeavoured to dispose of her work at St. Clement's it would have been considered as decidedly unladylike, and as derogating from her position as a gentlewoman of the Endowment. However, she knew what was expected of her, and when she hinted now and then, in a casual sort of way, about her little investments in "The Funds," we accepted the harmless fiction as though it

were a fact patent to everybody, and never breathed the slightest suspicion that we knew anything to the contrary.

Whenever there was a vacancy in our little colony—and such vacancies could only arise through death—the trustees used to meet in solemn deliberation to elect a successor. The rule was that all applications should be sent in, sealed, and marked "Private," and the trustees were supposed not to divulge the names of the unsuccessful candidates. How it happened I don't know, but true it was that we ladies (I class myself in these pages as one of them, although I was little more than a child at the time) generally ascertained, by some occult means, the names of the candidates at least a week before the letters they sent in were opened by the trustees. Then it was that we, too, met in solemn conclave, to discuss the merits and demerits of the various applicants—and very sharply discussed they sometimes were. But when once the trustees had made their election, and the name of the successful candidate was known, our tongues were silenced. However much some of us might regret that some other lady had not been elected, the matter was now at an end, and such regrets were useless. The chosen lady had now become one of us. That was enough. We might have said this or that about her previously, but now we were prepared to ignore, or politely overlook, all little defects and deficiencies, and to bid her welcome to her new home.

When we were joined by a new-comer, although it was quite possible that she might already be known to some of us, it was not considered the proper thing for any of us to call on her, till after Miss Whincop, as the recognised head of society at the Endowment, had set us the example. After Miss Whincop had called we made haste to do likewise. If the new-comer met with an especial amount of Miss Whincop's approval, that lady would invite us all to tea on the afternoon following her visit, and there introduce our new friend to each of us in turn.

Quiet little tea-parties among ourselves were very much in vogue at the Endowment, especially during the winter months, when the long, dreary evenings would have seemed twice as long, without the relief of such little social gatherings. It was an understood thing that on such occasions state and ceremony should in a great measure be dispensed with; remembering

always that we were gentlewomen, we could not afford to dispense with it altogether. At such times we could wear our second-best cap, without derogation to ourselves, or the company we were going to meet; also a dress that had been dyed or turned—and we always knew how many times each others' dresses had been dyed or turned.

A plate of thin bread and butter, one or two sally-lunns nicely toasted, or a few well-buttered crumpets, with a teapot liberally supplied with gunpowder or bohea in place of the homely congou; such was our fare at these little gatherings. After tea we sat down deliberately and seriously to whist. It was very rarely that any other game was played. Occasionally, about Christmas-time, we would abjure whist for a week or two and condescend to speculation or loo, out of regard for the festive season; but we always reverted to our favourite game as soon as the new year was fairly in.

The first question that was always asked, before a new-comer joined us, was, "Can she play a good hand at whist?" for our ladies, like Mrs. Battle, were great sticklers for "the rigour of the game." It was felt as a common misfortune if, by chance, a lady was elected who had no knowledge of cards. Such ladies were certainly asked out to tea less frequently than those who could help to make up a rubber, and, as a consequence, some degree of discrimination was needed in the issuing of invitations, in order that three players might not find themselves saddled with a fourth who could not play, and so have to make-shift with dummy.

After tea, when the card-table was drawn out, the unfortunate non-players were relegated into a corner by themselves and given a book of engravings, or a "hortus siccus," to look at, or were allowed to do a little embroidery; but if there happened to be two of them, they were on no account permitted to talk. Miss Whincop never could remember her sevens and eights, and Miss Damer was sure to revoke, if anybody talked even in a whisper.

It was an understood thing that at these gatherings no higher stakes should be played for than sixpence a rubber, and as it was a rare thing for more than two rubbers to be got through in one evening, no great harm was done. But no new-comer ever failed to be told how Miss Whincop, in her younger days, had once played for guinea points at Headlam Castle,

and had won five spade-guineas from the Earl of Treluce. When the second rubber had come to an end, a decanter of cowslip or ginger wine, and a dish of biscuits, would be put on the table. On these occasions it was not considered etiquette to drink more than one glass of wine, and after Miss Whincop set the example of leaving nearly a third of hers in her glass, we all took care to do the same. Sometimes, in very cold weather, hot elderberry wine would be substituted for cowslip or ginger. It was certainly very comforting on frosty nights. By ten o'clock we were all in bed.

But there were not wanting other occasions of greater state and ceremony, when two or three ladies belonging to the outside world would be invited to meet two or three ladies of the Endowment: our sitting-rooms were not large enough to accommodate more than seven or eight people at one time. Then it was that our carefully-hoarded satins and our stiff brocaded silks saw daylight. Then it was that anxious debates were held as to whether our best cap, with an additional puff here and an extra ribbon there, might not be made to do duty once more, or whether we must really go to the expense of a new one. Then it was that we brought out and furbished up our little stock of antiquated jewellery; and then, alas! more than at other times, it was that, to anyone who would listen to us, we used to get talking in a half-melancholy strain of those youthful days now so far away, when to dress for a party was one of the dearest delights of life. And what charming never-to-be-forgotten parties people gave in those days! And the gentlemen then were worth calling gentlemen; so different from now! And so on, and so on. Many an hour have I listened to such confessions—if confessions they may be called—from one or other of the ladies, as they sat ready dressed, waiting for the clock to strike and tell them it was time to set out.

On these afternoons of high ceremony, it was not unfrequently the practice of the lady who gave the party, to augment her little stock of silver articles from the stores of other ladies. She might be possessed of a silver teapot, but be minus a silver cream ewer, or vice versa. She might have silver candlesticks, but be short of snuffers; or she might have more guests than tea-spoons. But whatever deficiencies might exist could always be made up by somebody else, and in such

cases it was a point of etiquette to make believe, even among ourselves, that all the silver at any one party belonged to our hostess. We might see our own teapot on the table, or our left-hand neighbour's sugar-tongs; but we never recognised them, or spoke of them again.

But we were not always immured within the walls of the Endowment. Occasionally a carriage would stop at the gateway, or a sedan would be brought up to the door of one of the cottages, and one or another of the ladies would be whirled away for a few hours into the gay world outside—we used sometimes to speak of it as “the giddy vortex”—although, indeed, it was neither very gay nor very giddy so far as we were concerned. Such junketings rarely went beyond tea and cards, but it was the fact of their taking place outside the Endowment, that imparted to them such a delicious air of dissipation.

But there were other ladies for whom no carriage or sedan ever called, who, when they went out to tea, were content to go in a silk calash and spring clogs, and with their best caps carefully pinned underneath their dresses.

As I have mentioned already, each cottage consisted of three small rooms, comprising a sitting-room, kitchen, and bedroom. There would not have been anything like sufficient work for a servant to do, however young she might have been, at any one of the cottages, putting aside the fact that very few of the ladies were prepared to go to such an expense. The rule was for two ladies to have one servant between them, and then only for half a day, except on Saturdays, when more cleaning than usual had to be done. The one exception to this rule was Miss Whincop, who always kept her own servant; but that was only natural, because everybody knew she was rich, and really had money invested in “The Funds.” Some of the half-day servants were girls of sixteen, while others were middle-aged women. They came in the morning, lighted the fires, got breakfast ready, and did all the scouring and cleaning that was to be done.

My aunt and Miss Fyvie, whose cottages adjoined each other, had one servant between them—an elderly woman, Molly Dawson by name. One week my aunt's fires were lighted first, and the next week Miss Fyvie's. And what a trouble it was to light fires in those days, as I now and then discovered to my cost! For it some-

times happened that Molly was laid up with rheumatics, in which case it devolved on me to light the fire and prepare breakfast for my aunt and myself. There were no lucifer-matches in those days, you will please remember. Instead, we had long thin strips of wood, plentifully smeared with brimstone at both ends. When your fire was ready laid, you had to get your tinder-box, and with the steel in one hand, and a piece of flint in the other, to hammer away till a spark from them fell on the tinder and ignited it. Then to the burning tinder you applied your brimstone-match, and there you were. But on cold winter mornings it was a terrible process to anyone not an adept at it. In the first place you were pretty sure to scarify your fingers with the sharp bit of flint, and, in the second, you might keep on striking away for ten minutes, or even a quarter of an hour, before eliciting a spark that would light the tinder, by which time you would be all but frozen. Ah! what beautiful and blessed things are lucifer-matches!

Sometimes in the depth of winter, when the cottage stood deep in snow, my aunt would rake the kitchen fire. This was done by covering it three or four inches deep with slack and coal dust, battenning the whole well down, and pouring half a pint of water over it. As a rule, the fire thus treated would keep alight all night, but the one drawback to this process was that it made such a terrible mess of your grates.

Then, as now, coals formed a very serious item in the housekeeping expenses of families not over well-to-do. I know that in the Endowment some of the poorer gentlewomen used to adopt various methods of economising their fuel. Miss Anstruther's method seemed to me rather an ingenious one, although at the same time it was pitiful to think that a lady of sixty, and a rector's daughter, should be reduced to such a strait. Her method was to let her fire go out, as soon as her tea-kettle had boiled. But from the kettle she filled a large stone bottle, and having securely corked it, she wrapped it in flannel, and put it on the floor for her feet to rest on. Then, with an old travelling coat buttoned round her that had once been her father's, lighted by a single miserable dip, and with her feet resting on the bottle, she would work away at her embroidery till far into the night—till every other light in the Endowment had

long been extinguished. Poor lady! Poor gentle-hearted Miss Anstruther!

Although our gentlewomen were, to a certain extent, shut out from the great world and its doings, and although they were no longer so young as they had been, it will already have been perceived that there was very little asceticism among them, and that they still betrayed a lively interest in those things that had been dear to them thirty years before. When spring or autumn brought in the changing fashions, our ladies were always agog for early information as to what particular styles were likely to be most worn during the coming season. It was not that they themselves were votaries who were likely to follow closely in Fashion's wake; it was that such matters had had a certain fascination for them, ever since the day they left school, and would continue to have till the day they died.

The head dressmaker and milliner in St. Clement's—for, in this instance, the two businesses were combined—was a certain Madame Taylor. Why she called herself Madame I could never make out, seeing that she was English to the backbone. Madame's chief assistant was a Miss Wharton. Now Miss Wharton and our Miss Fyvie, as was well known to us all, were great friends. Miss Fyvie always declared that her friend was the daughter of a doctor who had ruined his family by gambling, otherwise we should perhaps have considered the connection as rather a derogatory one.

Well, one spring afternoon we were sent for all in a hurry by Miss Fyvie. Molly came running in to summon us. We were not to wait even to change our dress. All the ladies were there in less than ten minutes, but we found that Miss Whincop had got there before any of us, and from her manner we could tell that she knew why we had been so specially summoned. However, we were not kept long in suspense. On the little table was a good-sized bandbox, which Miss Fyvie at once proceeded to open. In it, wrapped up in cotton wool and tissue paper, were a number of dolls which Madame Taylor had that day received from London—dolls, that is, dressed in accordance with the new fashions for the coming season. Miss Wharton had got possession of them for an hour, and had brought them for us to look at. It was really very kind of her. Even the great county ladies would not have the privilege of seeing them till to-

morrow. I leave you to imagine how deeply we were interested, and what a delightful hour we spent with the splendidly-dressed little puppets.

Miss Wharton favoured us several times afterwards in the same way. We all agreed with Miss Whincop that she was a most superior person, and that there could be no doubt she had seen better days.

I remember that it was either the next day or the day but one after Miss Wharton first brought the dolls for us to look at, that the master, Mr. Drysdale, brought Major Toplady in to Wednesday afternoon prayers. It was a fine warm afternoon, and we were all in our places by two minutes before five. In addition to the gentlewomen, there were three or four ladies of the neighbourhood, together with one or two nursemaids and some half-dozen children. We all began to fidget a little when the clock pointed to four minutes past five and Mr. Drysdale had not arrived; it was such a rare thing for him to be unpunctual. At precisely six minutes past five he walked in with Major Toplady on his arm. We could hardly believe our eyes.

The major must have been sixty-five years old if he was a day, but he was looked upon still, at least by elderly people, as the greatest buck and lady-killer in St. Clement's. There were several gentlemen in our little town who wore Hessian boots and large frills to the bosoms of their shirts, but Major Toplady was the only one left who wore a queue. He had worn a pigtail all his life—or, at least, since he was a dashing young ensign of nineteen—and he would doubtless wear one till the day of his death. He was very thin, and very upright. His cheeks had a rich purple tint, which some people said was caused by the old port for which he was reputed to have such a liking, while others averred that it resulted from his stiff military stock which always looked as if it half strangled him. The major was not quite so firm on his feet as he had once been, but instead of carrying a stout cane to help him along, he was never seen without the thinnest possible switch, such as young dandies of twenty used to carry when I was a girl. By our sex he was regarded with a certain amount of awe and curiosity. Report said that in years gone by he had called out a gentleman for speaking slightly of a lady with whom he was acquainted, and that he had shot him through the heart. How could we help being interested in such a man? He could be seen any sunny after-

noon sauntering up and down the Pavement, as we called the best part of our High-street, with his hat very much on one side, ogling the ladies through his large double eye-glass. I always noticed that whenever Miss Lawson or Miss Fyvie—or, for the matter of that, any other of the gentlewomen—saw him in the distance, although they all pretended to detest "that odious Major Toplady," yet they never failed to perk themselves up a little, and would give their skirts an extra shake out as he drew near. What a thing it is to have a reputation as a "lady-killer!"

You may imagine the sensation that was created among us, when this formidable being stalked into the room. We looked at each other, and one or two of us turned quite pale, but Miss Whincop, strange to say, actually blushed. The major's boots creaked loudly as he walked along the flagged floor, with his arm in that of the master. Somehow he impressed me as being one of those men who enjoy hearing their boots creak. So he stalked along, looking neither to right nor left, and deposited himself in one of the front seats. He followed the prayers attentively, repeating the responses in a loud and sonorous voice, and his "Amens," as Miss Lawson remarked, were "positively edifying."

The last "Amen" was hardly said before the major stood up, turned round, and took a general survey of the gentlewomen through his double eyeglass. It would appear that he had some acquaintance with Miss Whincop, a fact which that lady had never mentioned, and he now marched up to her, made her one of his sweeping, elaborate bows, and began to speak to her in a low voice. We could see Miss Whincop's colour come and go painfully. She seemed to answer him in a constrained sort of way, and as if she were slightly offended. Presently she made him one of her old-fashioned curtsies, and turned her back deliberately on him. The major looked mightily offended, and stared after her for a minute or two. Then he took a pinch of snuff loudly and demonstratively, and then he called out: "Drysdale, if you're ready, I'm at your service."

We all devoutly hoped that the master would never bring Major Toplady in to prayers again, and he never did.

It was curious that for three or four afternoons after the major's "irruption," as Miss Lawson termed it, Miss Whincop

should put on her best embroidered silk, and her new cap, that had cost her a guinea-and-a-half only a week before, and be sitting in state by three o'clock, ready to receive company. But nobody called, and after Sunday, the best cap and embroidered silk were put away. Still, I never could understand how it was that none of the gentlewomen ever mentioned Major Toplady's name in the presence of Miss Whincop.

A QUIET NIGHT.

So still the starry night, I almost fear
My mortal tread, lest I should put to flight
A fairy that, for sometime of the year,
Holds court in this old garden by the night.
The flow'rs are broad awake: for very truth
On this forsaken ground enchantment dwells,
Such as may breathless hold an am'rous youth,
Who seeks at dead of night for lover spells,
With anxious, fearful heart in haunted dells.

I will not walk, but sit upon this seat,
That I may see, and hear, and no noise make;
In time gone by how many gentle feet
Strayed hitherward to rest for dear Love's sake?
Brave, bright-eyed youths, and many a gentle maid
Came, haply, here in June or autumn cold,
Leaving the great hall by the portal's shade
To tell a tale that even then was old—
How oft at this seat has the tale been told?

The growing things, it seems, have eyes to see;
They softly shake their heads, but make no moan;
It may be they are whispering of me,
And wond'ring why I wandered here alone.

I am not waiting for a partner; no,
You need not point at me for that; the hall
Is rank with ruin; lovers do not go
To feast together at the baron's call,
For years they have been dead and buried, all.

How silent! how bewilderingly calm!
How strange in such a place to be alone!
The big owl on the bough is fixed by charm;
The cat sits on the wall still as a stone:
Listen! the nightingale!—Oh, what a thrill
Of glory falls on all fair things around!
Now know I why this place has been so still;
The fairies have shut out all grosser sound
To hear your song in this old garden-ground.

ONLY NELL.

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

"O-ver! O-o-ver!"

It was the fourteenth time that day that I had heard the same words, sometimes only a long, shrill cry; sometimes prolonged over the second syllable. Getting impatient at last, I went to the window and looked out.

I had taken lodgings that summer in a little village on the banks of the Thames. They looked out upon the river, and I had only been in them a few days, when the frequent repetition of the monotonous cry alluded to drove me to ascertain its cause. It was a wet afternoon in the latter end of September; the sky was covered

with dark, rain-charged clouds, breaking every now and then into a sharp shower which bowed the yellowing foliage of the willows beneath it, and lashed the gray and turbid water into fierce resistance.

The river, swollen with late rains, was indeed running very fast when I looked out on it; and just midway between shore and shore I saw a clumsy boat pulled by a little girl, who was evidently putting out her whole strength to reach the farther side, where a man, in labourer's dress, was waiting on the bank for her.

At first sight it seemed strange that she should have attempted it; for the boat was of the largest and heaviest, and the child herself did not look more than ten years old; her thin little arms, blue and bare to the elbow, seeming hardly able to wield the oars, while every stroke drew her small body so far backwards as to give me frequent glimpses of a face—pale and sharp, and framed in tangled yellow hair—turned upwards to the leaden sky above.

Apparently, however, she had not miscalculated her strength; for in the course of a minute or two she was safe on the farther side, had taken the man on board, and was pulling back again vigorously. Another few minutes and I heard the grate of the keel on the gravel; and, going to the balcony, saw that she had just grounded the boat at the bottom of a narrow causeway, which led down to the water within a few yards of my lodgings, and was standing up in the bows, busily lashing the boat with no inexperienced fingers to a rusty iron stake which stood up out of the mud, apparently for that purpose. The man had already jumped on shore; and, having finished her task, she stood still for a moment, her ragged dress and hair blowing out in the rough, wet wind, her short arms clasped behind her head with a yawn of such utter weariness I could not help pitying her. Then a harsh voice called out:

"Nell! Nell, ye huzzy, don't stan' loitering there now." A coarse red face was thrust out of an upper window of the little public-house which crowned the top of the causeway; and with a frightened glance the child scrambled ashore and ran up to the house, her naked feet pattering over the muddy stones till she disappeared at the top.

Ten minutes later I heard the old cry, "O-ver! o-ver!" sounding from the opposite shore; and through the stillness that followed, and the open window, the "gluck" of the oars in the rowlocks as the girl pushed out again on her monotonous journey.

At dinner that day I asked my landlady who the child was, and how it came that she had to do a work so disproportioned to her size and apparent strength. The good woman looked at me in surprise.

"Barkers' girl, sir?" she said, inquiringly. "Oh! she is strong enough; a deal more so than she looks. Why, I've seen her ferryin' over, with the wind in her teeth enough to take your head off, and the river running like a sea, an' not mind. Once, though, it were too strong for her, an' she got blown back'ards, let one oar go and 'it herself such a crack with the other that it knocked her senseless into the bottom of the boat, an' they drifted down the river an' got stuck in those reeds 'alf a mile below the church there afore she came to, or anyone noticed her. I 'eard as Barker gave her an awful wallop- ing for that. He's the ferryman, you know, sir, an' keeps that there public on the top; an' it seems one o' the oars were broke or lost; an' he said it couldn't ha' happened without she'd been fooling with 'em or summat o' that sort; but the stream were too strong for a girl like 'er that day, an' he ought to ha' gone himself. . . . Her father? Oh! bless you no, sir. She's nothing in the world but a work'us brat, an' ain't got no other name but Nell as I've ever heard on. Barkers took her in three year ago, acause of 'aving no children of their own; an' at first she did use to help in the 'ouse only; but she soon learnt to pull an oar 'andy enough to take a party over, when he were busy in the bar; an' now she does three parts of it. . . . Well, they do tell he's most always drunk nowadays, an' his wife too, for that matter; an' they knock that girl about awful, I will say. Why, I've often 'eard her screams right in here of a night time, when they've been banging of her. . . . Brutes? Eh, well, sir, maybe 'tis a bit brutal; for she's but a little 'un yet; but they're a bad lot there altogether, the worst lot out an' out in the parish; an' I doubt (saving your presence, sir) but she's a sad young limb o' the devil 'erself. Why, there's more fightin' an' cursin' in that there public, than in any other within ten miles. It's just as good as to say a man's goin' to the bad as to say you've seen him going into Barker's; an' our rector have tried to get the licence took away a dozen times; but some'ow they al'ays manages to scrape over an' get it renewed. 'Tain't likely as a child 'd be worth anything brought up that way, an'

never going to church, nor school, no more than a heathen savage; an' I give my little Tommy a good whack the other day 'cause, in spite of my tellin' 'im not, I caught him playing with 'er down by the boats; an' Miss Prosen, the rector's daughter, passin' by at the minnit. . . . Oh yes, sir, that's all very well, an' a' course one do pity all such misbrought-up gutter children, poor things! but our first dooty is to take keer on our own families, as I'm sure, sir, you'd allow if so be you was a father yourself; an' I do assure you the trouble an' worrit of 'aving that public alongside o' me is more nor you'd think." With which, and being somewhat out of breath, Mrs. Jennings retreated to bring up my pudding; and seeing that the subject was a tender one with her, I took care not to renew it.

Not being a father myself, however, with a "dooty" to my own family, I could not help feeling some interest in the poor little outcast from civilisation, whose screams, under her master's thrashings, disturbed the serenity of the neighbouring village pharisees. I had come to S— on a sketching excursion; and next time I wanted to cross the river, I turned down by the objectionable public, a disreputable-looking place enough, and bearing the sign of "The Free Ferry" over the door, and catching sight of Nell, scraping a large kettle, outside, asked her to ferry me over. With a curt nod for answer, and a shout of "Ferry!" addressed as if in explanation to the interior of the house, she dropped her work instantly, scampered off, and had got the boat unlashd and ready to push out, before I could get down to her.

"Give me the oars," I said then, noticing that she had a great inflamed bruise on her left arm, and seemed to move it with difficulty. "I'll pull myself over," and then, as she obeyed, though with some surprise in her face, I added:

"Doesn't it hurt you to row with your arm in that state? How did you do it?"

The look of wonder in her eyes increased. Possibly it was the first time anyone had spoken gently to her for a long while. Glancing down at the bruise she answered with a voice and accent less coarse than I had expected:

"'Twas missus's stick, sir; but I don't mind. I can row all the same if you like."

"I don't like. Does she often mark you that way with her stick, child?"

"Not wi'out I's been vexing of 'er, sir. 'Tain't nothin' anyhow," with a grateful

look in her brown eyes, which touched me more than I liked. "Missus says as I marks easier nor any girl she ever met."

"She doesn't hit you the lighter for that," I said, indignantly. "Why don't you try and find a kinder mistress?"

Again she looked at me in wonder, not unmingled with contempt, at my asking the question.

"I aren't nothin' to do wi' findin' 'em, sir. 'Twas the work'us 'prenticed me to master, an' I don't think he'd fare to do wi'out me now anyways."

"You talk as if you liked him! Is he kinder to you than his wife?"

The query seemed to puzzle her, for she thought over it for a moment before answering.

"I dunno, sir. He 'its me 'arder, but he don't 'it so, often, an' he ain't always naggin' at a gal; but when he's put out just cusses at yer, no more. Last week tho' he took an' tied me up one day, an' licked me till I was sick; but he'd took too much then; an' when he come round he guv' me a penny, an' said he 'adn't gone fur to do it. Folks is awful down on master; but he ain't so bad as they say, sir, don't you b'lieve it. Please, sir, that's the spot to ground 'er."

She spoke, looking up full in my face the whole time, as she sat in the bottom of the boat, where she had crouched when I relieved her of the oars. A plain, almost ugly little face, wide-mouthed, sharp, and colourless, and with only those brown eyes which had much of the candid, patient look of a shepherd's dog, peering through a tangled mat of yellow elf-locks to redeem it. You could see her wretched little body through some of the holes in her cotton frock, and her legs and feet were bare. I jumped ashore and gave her a shilling for herself.

"To buy whatever you like with," I said, as she grew perfectly incoherent in her wonder of gratitude, "and come for me again at four, Nell. You won't forget?"

"No, indeed, sir, that I won't," she answered, her whole face beaming with a grin which made it look perfectly elf-like; and I went on my way. I was back again at the time mentioned, and found her sitting under the bank waiting for me. Her face wore a very different expression now, though; the eyes were almost swollen out of her head with crying, and she evidently tried to avoid mine as she busied herself with the oars. I took them from her again, however, and asked

what was the matter. There was no answer at first; or only a tremendous sob heaving her chest as if it were like to burst, and the head turned more resolutely away; so, not wishing to tease her, I inquired instead what she had bought with her shilling. Unconsciously I had hit the sore point itself, and she burst out crying so that she could hardly answer.

"It fell out o' my dress as I were cleanin', an' missus up an' took it from me. She said I'd stole it, an' it weren't mine, an' she took it away. Oh dear, oh dear, she did," and the tears burst out again, and were only checked by my proposal to go and speak to her mistress, and tell her I had given her the money. She grew pale with fright at that idea, and implored me not to do so. "Missus would kick her awful for tellin', an' 'twouldn't make no difference otherways. Please would I not!" Of course I promised to hold my tongue, and (which was perhaps weak, as she might have been lying) I gave her another shilling to make up for her loss. She surprised me, however, by her unwillingness to take it. "'Twasn't that she wanted at all," she stammered, growing scarlet, with an evident feeling of delicacy which I hadn't expected in such a little pariah, "an' she hadn't meant for to let me know about it, only I would ask her."

I had quite a difficulty in forcing it on her before we parted.

PART II.

I DON'T know whether it was the incident of the shilling, but after this day Barkers' Nell and I became quite friends. I was painting at a bit of common on the farther side of the river, and every morning, provided the weather was anything like fine, she ferried me and my traps over and came for me again in the afternoon, a habit which resulted in my soon learning all about her.

She, too, told me she was "only Nell; never had no other name as she'd heard of. No, hadn't got no parents neither. B'lieved her mother had left her outside the work'us-door; and as to a father, didn't think she'd ever had one. Thought it likely mother were a bad lot. She was, too; Mrs. Barker often told her so; an' as folk said Mrs. Barker were the baddest lot in the parish, s'posed she was worse. No, she didn't mind it much either, 'cept when Mrs. Jennings, where I lodged, gave her Tommy a whippin' for playing wi' her. Tommy was fond of 'er 'cos she used to row 'im across in the boat now an' then,

an' saved up sweeties for him when she could get 'em. He used to kiss her, too, an' call her 'poor dear Nell,' an' say he loved her; and Mrs. Barker were a beast to whack 'im, that she were, for she'd never done nothink to hurt 'im, she would take her oath o' that; and now he never comed near her; an' once, when Mrs. Jennings was out o' the way, and she beckoned him to have a row, made a face at her an' called out, 'No, I won't, for mother says you're a wicked thing.'" If Nell was sure of anything it was that she hated Mrs. Jennings. She had no friends of her own, she told me; had had one once; but though the girl was willing enough to talk with her and take anything Nell could get hold of to give her, she wouldn't turn her head to smile at her when Nell met her all dressed out and going to church with the other Sunday-school girls, and made believe to be looking the other way. Nell wasn't going to have "nothink more to do wi' 'er arter that," and seemed glad that I saw it in the same light. "Besides, she wasn't wantin' friends, an' hadn't no time for 'em. Missus give 'er too much to do for that."

It was for the same reason that she scouted all notion of going to church or school herself, and, indeed, expressed a cheerful conviction that "sich things wasn't for the like o' her." She had been once to the former place, "when she was littler; but the children pointed at her and laughed; an' parson he got up in a 'igh place, an' talked a lot o' gibberish as couldn't have no meanin' anyway." She thought it a slow entertainment on the whole; and had never wanted to go again.

And yet, with all these heathenish habits and opinions, it often struck me that Nell set a shining example to many of her Christian neighbours around. In a house where everybody else was drunk or drinking all day and every day, I never detected even the slightest taste for spirits in her. Among people who hardly ever spoke but in the foulest language, and with oaths and curses interlarding every sentence, her own conversation was singularly pure, and when an unorthodox word did come into it, it was not spoken in anger, but with a childish serenity which showed her innocence of its being in any way unsuitable to her young lips. People said that Barker's was a common resort for tramps, men and women, of the lowest order, and that scenes went on there that would not bear repetition; but Nell told me of her own accord that, beyond a rough pat or

curse as humour dictated, they seldom interfered with her; and "if they was extra riotous a' night" she used to take her blanket, and sleep out in the yard under an old boat, where she had made a lair of straw for herself, and no one meddled with her there. She had no time, indeed, for wickedness, and (apparently) no natural inclination to make it; but with a master who beat and cursed, and a mistress who starved and tyrannised over her, slaved cheerfully away, day after day, from dawn till midnight, seeming to do pretty well all the housework as well as the ferrying; never getting any amusement, never given a holiday, never hearing a kind word—a child with a woman's patience and long-suffering, and a free, generous little spirit, which rarely allowed even a word of grumbling or complaint to escape her; and indeed was always ready to put forward a good word for her tormentors instead, and plead, against accusing voices, that "Barker weren't as bad as people said; an' there was a deal o' good in him, bless yer! when he hadn't took too much, an' folk didn't cross him. She wasn't afeard o' him anyhow."

Her courage was to be tried sooner than we thought!

It was a wet evening, and I was returning home from a long walk, when, in passing "The Free Ferry," I saw a bundle of rags, the shape of which I thought I recognised, huddled up under a wood-pile outside the house. The rain was coming down so hard, however, that, though I called her name, I hardly thought it could be Nell exposed to such weather; but I was wrong, for at the sound of my voice she sprang up instantly and came to me, pleasure at seeing me struggling with a latent expression of anxiety and fear, pitiful to see in so young a face.

"Why, Nell, what are you sitting out in the wet for?" as she stood shivering before me, the rain dripping from the edges of her ragged frock. "You will catch your death, child."

"Oh no, sir, I won't. A bit o' rain don't hurt me," she answered with the smile which always gave her ugly little face such a weird look. "An' I'd liefer be out 'ere. They be so awful wild to-night, I got feared to stay wi' 'em"—jerking her head in the direction of the house, in which, to judge from the noise, a saturnalia of devils seemed to be holding feast—"an' I wos a' watchin' to see yer come 'ome as well, sir, to give yer these."

And she put into my hands a bunch of wild violets, wet and fragrant, adding, as I began to thank her:

"Yer said yer 'adn't seen none this autumn; so I thought I'd go off to-day to a wood, where they grows, an' get 'em for yer."

"That was very kind of you, Nell," I said, touched by the little attention in my Ishmaelitish young friend. "But where did you get that black eye? Did you fall down on the way?"

She was as sure-footed as a cat, and laughed at the idea.

"Missus give it me to make me tell 'er where I'd been, an' I wouldn't 'cos she welted me fust for goin'. Oh, it don't 'urt now," as I uttered a wrathful exclamation against her tyrants. "An' I didn't mind s'long as I could 'ide the v'lets from her. She'd ha' chucked 'em inter the fire otherways."

"And I shall value them very much, and take great care of them," I said; "but, Nell, I don't like violets so well that I like you to get beaten for them."

"Oh, I didn't care, sir, bless yer!" said the girl, brightly, her thin little face colouring up at my thanks. "An' I liked gettin' of 'em, for yer've been very good to me, sir. Hark! isn't that master callin'?"

The frightened look had come back into her eyes, and I tried to detain her, saying that I was sure Mrs. Jennings would let her sleep in one of the out-places for the night, if I asked her. "You'd much better not go back to them till morning, child. They seem to be all mad together; and it's no fit place for you."

She shook her head, quite trembling at the mere idea.

"Oh no. I must go, I must indeed, sir. Missus 'd 'alf kill me to-morrow if I didn't. 'Tis the threshin'-machine men from the Black Country as is there; an' they're al'ays a bad lot; an' she'll want me to 'elp serve 'em. 'Tain't them I'm afraid of neither."

"Who then, Nell?"

"Mr. Barker," and she almost whispered it. "Sometimes he goes on the soak for three or four days, till he gets downright mad, an' don't know nothin' nor more nor if he were a wild beast, an' then I be daunted of 'im. He's been awful bad to-day, an' cotched me up once an' tried to mash me agin' the door, a-swearin' he'd be the death o' me. One o' the other men pulled 'im off, an' I was so feared I came

out 'ere; but maybe he's sleepin' now, he most al'ays goes off like a log arter one o' these takes on; an' if missus is wantin' me. . . . Yes, there she's callin' again! Oh, please, sir, let me go. I aren't frightened now, an' she'll give it me so if I don't."

And indeed the fear of her tyrant gave the child such strength that, before I could speak, she had pulled her hand out of mine, and darted back to the house.

I walked slowly on to my own, and as I arranged the violets in water, I made a mental vow that I would lose no time in trying to get the child into an industrial school, or some other home, where she could be properly taught and cared for.

On the following morning, however, I received a note from a friend at Maidenhead, saying that he had taken a house there, and asking if I would run down and spend a couple of days with him. It was an old college chum, whom I had not seen for some years; so I only waited to telegraph an acceptance, and, putting up a few things in a bag, started as desired. It was the fourth day before I got home, and the first thing Mrs. Jennings said to me, as she waited on me at dinner, was:

"What do you think, sir? That girl o' Barkers is dead."

"Dead! Nell!" The shock and the suddenness of it seemed to take away my breath. My landlady looked at me in some surprise.

"Yes, sir, Nell," she answered, cheerfully, and evidently rather pleased at having a piece of news to regale me with. "Fell down the cellar-stairs, at that there public, and was killed dead. 'Twas the night afore you went away too; an' they'd a lot of them threshing-machine folk in there, as is al'ays the most disreputable lot as ever was. They won't 'ave 'em at the Black Lion, 'cause of the rows they makes; but that just suits Barkers; an' row enough they was making that night. Why, I wonder you didn't 'ear it in your bed, sir, an' I suppose the girl was drinkin' with them, or up to some larkin' or other. Anyway, she went an' pitched right down the cellar-stairs, an' her head come again an' iron bar at the bottom. They say you could ha' put your 'and in the place, it was cut that deep, an' she were stark an' cold by the time Missis Barker missed 'er, as was a couple of hours arterwards. Ah!

well, it's a good moral, too, as I tells my servant-girl here, of the end those sort o' shameless children come to; an' there's one good out of it. They'd an inkwich on her yesterday mornin', an' the crowner he give it Mrs. Barker strong about the 'ouse. Barker was too dead drunk (ill abed they called it) to appear; an' the licence is to be took away from 'em; so they'll 'ave to go elsewheres, as is a mercy to 'umbly thank the Lord for, I'm sure."

And bought by Nell's life! Poor Nell! poor little martyred Nell! I don't know what I said to Mrs. Jennings, nothing very wise or rational, probably; but to see her violets there, still unfaded and sweet-smelling in the cup where I had placed them that night, while the willing hands that had gathered them were lying cold and stiff under the clods in the parish coffin into which she had been huddled as soon as the inquest was over, was too much for me at the moment; and Mrs. Jennings lost a lodger whom she had, perhaps, calculated on for some time longer. I have often wondered since how the child really met her death, and from whose hand the savage blow came which—who could doubt it for a moment?—knocked the young life out of her.

It was no use to moot the question, however, where no one cared to sift it. The threshing folk, who might have answered, if, indeed, they were not implicated themselves, had appeared as the witnesses of Mrs. Barker's story, and were now gone away, no one knew whither. The Barkers were not likely to turn informers on themselves; and no one else had any interest in the subject. Her very grave was not to be recognised; for two other pauper children had been buried on the same day, and even the sexton could not distinguish the nameless, shapeless clay mound which held Nell's brave heart and bruised and broken little body, from those of the other two.

There is One who knows, however! a "Master" not on this earth, and more merciful than the careless friend who went to seek his pleasure, forgetful of the trembling child who had risked blows and bruises to get him the flowers he wished for. He, who cared so well for Nell as to take her away before those about her could do more harm than "hurt the body," will, I doubt not, remember where that body is laid, and will raise it up brighter and more glorious than many an earthly queen, in

the day when the crushed-out gutter-children of this world are gathered to sing the "new song" of the redeemed with their Father who is in Heaven.

H.M.'S COCKLESHELL.

It was rather unfortunate in some ways that we should have selected for our projected cruise in that gallant craft, H.M.'s cockleshell Midge, just the one day in goodness knows how many weeks when the ducks, and the cabbages, and the market-gardeners—selfish things—were rejoicing in a nice steady rain. The Thames, below bridge, is not an eminently picturesque or exhilarating river under the most favourable conditions. No doubt when you do get light enough to see by, a near view of its waters is as effective a remedy for any predisposition to suicide as could well be devised. But even so, I doubt if much of its potency would be due to any very keen sense of what our lady novelists would call "the beauty of all that must be left behind." Viewed through a Scotch mist, from the grimy deck of a Woolwich steamer, I can quite conceive of some tenderly æsthetic spirit, to which even that unromantic and unaromatic flood might present itself in the light of a refuge. However, Tom, who has been much impressed by what he saw the other night of Jack's haunts ashore,* has set his mind upon examining the question a little further, and having a look at the process by which those happy hunting-grounds of Lovely Nan and her employers are stocked. So to-day we are on a "crimping" cruise, and H.M.'s cockleshell—built, rigged, manned, equipped, and commissioned only a few months ago for that especial service—is to meet us at Woolwich Dockyard.

And perhaps after all, as we are to make the voyage, the present dismal conditions are, from the point of view of artistic completeness, as appropriate as could be wished. A change has come over the Isle of Dogs since I saw it last, and it has not been a change for the better. Those classic shores were never very lovely, but when I used to be upon the river, not so very many years ago, they did look, to some extent, inhabited. People used to build ships there then, and engines and boilers, and gigantic iron floating-

* ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, Vol. 16, p. 538, "Foreign Jack."

docks; and there was a curling of smoke, and a rushing of steam, a glare of furnace-fire, and a clang of hammers, which kept the place alive at all events; and on the whole, and regarded philosophically, was not without a certain comeliness of its own. But that was in the old days—before the strikes. The days when Paterfamilias returning, travelled and embrowned to St. Katharine's-wharf, from his daring and adventurous excursion into distant lands, would point triumphantly to the grim brick sheds that lined the muddy banks, and thrill with patriotic pride as he bade you not talk to him, sir, of your Rhines, and your vines, and your rubbish, but bring your foreigner here, sir, and let him see what an English river was like. Paterfamilias' patriotism would hardly lead to his bringing his foreigner hither now for any such purpose. Unless, indeed, he were a foreigner of exceedingly speculative turn, from some continental Colney Hatch, bent on investment in a slimy brown brick ruin or two. In such case he would have a very ample choice. As we steam along past the grisly skeletons of what were once building-yards, and forges and workshops of every kind, I point out to Tom, viciously sucking at a wet cigar by my side, that the best part of both banks of the river appears to be for sale. "Wish somebody 'd buy 'em all," answers Tom, cynically; "and take 'em away."

Woolwich Dockyard, when we at length arrive there, is not much livelier. I suppose somebody is at work somewhere; but if so, he is doing his work very unobtrusively, for there is no scent of smoke nor sound of hammer. We are kept waiting at the gate for some ten minutes or so, and certainly during that time no one passes out or passes in. Perhaps it is because visitors come but seldom, that the custodians of the gate regard us with such evident suspicion, and take so long in making up their minds to admit us. It can hardly be from the fear of our seeing anything; and as for any unsoundness on our part with regard to the eighth commandment, there does not appear to be anything to steal except some forty or fifty watercarts, carefully stowed away out of the rain under a big shed; and they would be a singularly superfluous acquisition on such a day as this. However, we effect an entrance at last, and in due course, and with some little aid from Tom's pocket-compass, make our way past the watercarts, and through the silent

waste beyond, to the crazy gangway, and the two or three slimy, mouldering barges, dignified by the title of the Dockyard Pier. And here at last we are alone indeed. When we first stepped cautiously along the slippery planks, there was a boy over the side of the training-ship, out in the stream yonder, superfluously sluicing the wet gangway with a huge mop, from a very small bucket; and there was a big policeman standing on a pile of rusty old iron, ever so far off in the silent yard, surveying us much as Mr. Crusoe may have surveyed that unexpected dinner-party from over the way. But the boy has emptied his bucket, and trundled his mop inboard again; and Mr. Crusoe, after standing motionless so long that we had begun to speculate as to whether he were not a stuffed policeman, set up to frighten the crows, has responded to a distant shout of "Arry! come and 'ave arf a pint!" and has disappeared, beerwards. The only sound is the lapping of the water as it swirls past, the pattering of the water as it pours steadily down. Tom, not commonly afflicted with quotations, grunts out something about "water, water, everywhere," and proposes that we shall follow 'Arry's example, and go and get a "drop to drink" somewhere, even at the risk of missing H.M.'s cockleshell altogether. When, just at the critical moment, H.M.'s cockleshell heaves in sight.

At a little distance the Midge has, perhaps, rather a look of being all funnel, and she has something of that fussy way with her, which small people and high-pressure steam-launches are apt to have. We can hear her coming without any need of her approach being signalled by the steam-whistle, and at first the big chimney and the stalwart form of her captain, as he stands beside it, looking in the thick atmosphere several sizes larger than life, have, on the whole, rather a top-heavy appearance. But she is a smart little craft enough when once fairly in view, with her fine bows, and her low rail, and her two little walking-canes of masts raking well aft. Very comfortably and compactly fitted too, we found her, when we got on board; with a tiny cabin, a couple of microscopic sleeping-berths, an infinitesimal pantry, and no end of other ingenious little contrivances for making you feel, for once at least in your life, what a very great man you are. For the Midge is, I should think, about the smallest craft that ever flew a pendant.

Not, however, by the way, that, in the strict and literal sense, she does as yet fly a pendant, or, indeed, any such insignia at all. The fertile brain of the marine secretary to the Board of Trade, to which she owes her own existence, is, I believe, at this moment, engaged in devising for her a suit of colours which shall be as novel as the service on which she is employed; but for the present we sail, somewhat piratically, without bunting of any kind. However, she is commanded by a captain in H.M.'s navy; and if she is, from some points of view, rather an oddity to look at, and does buzz along with considerably more fuss and clatter than a seventy-four, she is doing work which all the seventy-fours that ever swam—and they did swim, by the way, which was a point in their favour—never managed to do; and fighting, successfully too, the only enemy from which a British seventy-four ever cared to run away. I don't suppose, for the matter of that, that yonder dashing China tea-clipper, past which we have just buzzed viciously on our way down the river, would make any very serious bones about dropping a couple of tackles from the huge black yards on which the white sails are furled so trimly, and hoisting H.M.'s cockleshell—captain, crew, passengers and all—bodily on board. But the dashing China tea-clipper is very glad to put herself under the Midge's protection nevertheless; and the man on her forecastle, who touched his hat to us as we passed, was one of the Midge's crew taking care of the big ship on her way up to the West India docks.

The said crew, be it observed, has two or three peculiarities. In the first place they are not sailors at all; and though in a general sense this is, I am sorry to say, very much less of a peculiarity nowadays than it ought to be, it has, in her case, the excuse that it is not merely that they are not sailors, but that they are something else. With the exception of the stalwart individual who embodies in his single person the entire engineer's staff—and of the man at the wheel, to whom you are, of course, forbidden to talk, but who, when you do talk to him, will give you more information, as to the river and all things and people thereunto appertaining, than any other denizen of its muddy waters between this and the Nore—the Midge's crew are all policemen. Which brings me again to another peculiarity of theirs, viz., that they are never, or but very rarely, to

be found on board of their own ship. At this moment, except the captain, the man at the wheel, and the engineer—who is doing his best towards supplying the place of a watch on deck by leaning his elbows on the combings of his little booby-hatch, while he pokes up his fires below with the toe of his boot—there is not a single soul on board. The wind, it appears, has just chopped round from the eastward, in which unpleasant quarter it has been hanging for the last fortnight, and has brought up Channel with it a whole fleet of large craft from all quarters of the globe. Every one of Captain Pitman's hands is away, on board one or other of these homeward-bounders; and if he had as many again he could find useful employment for them all. Shortness of hands is indeed the chief difficulty under which he now labours; a difficulty, moreover, not at all lessened by a still further peculiarity of his command, in the fact of such hands as are allowed him not being really his own. If his crew were regularly entered on the Midge's books, and employed on no other service, it would be easy enough to make regulations under which they would do half as much work again as at present. The crimping service is a question of tides, and should be regulated accordingly. But Captain Pitman's men are only a loan from the police, and the police rule is eight hours a day. So eight hours a day is all that they can fairly be called on to perform, even on such a day as this, and when they have practically had nothing to do for the last fortnight. If it were not for the peculiar pleasure which English government departments always seem to derive from the economisation of that famous "ha'porth o' tar," one would be disposed to wonder that after going to the expense of building, fitting, and sailing the Midge for this express service, the authorities should grudge the weekly pay of the half-dozen extra hands whose employment would render her really efficient. As it is, however, Captain Pitman has to do his best with such hands as he can get; and when there comes a change of wind and a rush of ships, such as has come to-day, why some of them must take their chance.

Of this fact the crimps are very well aware, and act accordingly. If the Midge were in a position to put a man on board of every homeward-bound craft, they would have nothing to do but to sell off their own boats, and retire from

business. Even as it is, this trade is pretty severely checked, and, every now and then, one or another comes to the conclusion that it is no longer worth while either to patch up his own old tub any more, or to buy a new one. So, by the inexorable law of the survival of the fittest, the biggest rascals of the lot are gradually getting what is left of the trade into their own hands; and Jack, when he does get flayed, has a little more of his flesh removed with the hide than before.

They are out now in full force. Twice already our Ixion has called Captain Pitman's attention to some bit of a dingy, with her nose cocked out of the water, curiously like that of a shark rushing at his prey, as she is dragged along in the wake of some friendly steamer, with the expectant crimp smoking his pipe in the stern-sheets. Away down yonder, at the farther end of the Reach, is another, who, as we watch him through our glasses, is evidently in the very act of casting-off, to board another China clipper, following pretty close on her competitor's heels after their long race across the ocean. Suddenly, however, he appears to alter his mind. No doubt, some friend on board the tug, which has the big ship in tow, has warned him either that there is already a Board of Trade officer on board, or that the Midge herself has just hove in sight, and our friend takes the hint, makes all fast again, and continues his cruise in search of safer prey. And now we come within sight—and smell—of the more particular object of our present trip. There she lies, that big, deep-laden Aberdeener, whose wall-sides—so brave with new black paint when she went down the river a year or so ago—have now something the look of a mouldy whale; and from whose well-filled hold comes, borne to us on the damp river breeze, an odour decidedly, on the whole, rather pungent than balmy. She missed the tide last night, and unless our experience misleads us, we shall find the emissaries of Ratcliff-highway busy on board. For she is a fine prize, indeed; with such a plethora of golden blood as Wapping and Shadwell have not had left unguarded before their hungry noses for some time past. It is more than nine months now since Jack, luxuriating in her savoury fore-castle on hard tack and salt horse, with an occasional dab of mashed blanket—preserved potato the Act of Parliament calls it—by way of anti-scorbutic, has so much as put his foot over

her side. And all this time, and for some months before, on his way out, his monthly wages have been rolling up, till there will be such a sum waiting for him, by-and-by, at the Wapping office, as makes Jack's mouth water to think of it. And Jack's is not the only mouth that moistens at the thought. Johnny the Greek, and Johnny the Chinaman, and half-a-dozen other Johnnies, know the amount that will be waiting for Jack by-and-by just as well as Jack knows it himself, or better. And here they are, as we expected, looking out for their own share thereof. The great ship has, apparently, grown so accustomed to take things easy in her five or six months' waiting among the guano islands for her turn to load, that she is in no particular hurry even to get into dock; and the tug which is to take her up the river is not yet alongside. But there are three or four other boats alongside, sure enough—rickety little dingies, of the pattern of those we have just passed—as fast to the big ship's side as ever was swordfish to side of whale.

The tide has made up now for some time, and the ship's stern is towards us as we approach; so Johnny the Greek, and Johnny the Chinaman, and Johnny Shark in general, plying their busy trade under the break of the topgallant fore-castle, hear nothing of the warning buzz of the little Midge as she passes alongside. The master hears it, however, and welcomes us gladly. His ship, he tells us, has been pretty well out of his hands since daybreak; and, as for getting anything done, "Just you look at that there fo'k'sle, gentlemen, and judge for yourselves."

A lively scene, truly, and a hopeful one. There is Johnny, sure enough, in full force. Jack remembers him, and that snug little crib of his down in the Highway? Why, of course, he does. Or, if he does not, he remembers some other Johnny, and some other snug little crib, in the same Elysian quarter, as like him and it, as one spider and one web are like another. And Lovely Nan, too? Jack remembers Nan, don't he? Oh, Poll, was it? Ah yes! Poll, of course! To be sure it was. Why, it was only yesterday, as Poll was a-sitting in Johnny's little parlour—Jack remembers the little parlour, and all the larks as he used to have there—it was no longer ago than last night, as Nan—no, Poll—was a-sitting in that very parlour and asking after Jack as tender—ah! as tender as tender. "Which

"I'll give you a look in every night, Mr. Johnny," says she, "till Jack's ship comes home; for I can't never care for nobody," she says, "like him." And there Jack 'll find her to-night, surely. Take a drop more bottled stout, Jack? Ah! that's the stuff, aren't it? No tin? Lor' bless yer! that don't matter to Johnny. He'll trust his old friend Jack with a fivepun-note any day. Ain't got it about him just now, you know. Come away in such a hurry when he heard Jack's ship had come in. But just come to Johnny's little crib to-night, and— Have another pull at the stout, Jack. Have another pull at the stout!

Eloquence! Bless your heart, as Johnny would say—if he happened for the moment to be out of more forcible expressions—you take a twelvemonth's cruise in the grimy fore-castle of a guano ship, and then show me the eloquence to compare with this!

Poor Jack! Tom, who has been a voyage or two in his time, and knows the smack of a first draught of Guinness's or Barclay and Perkins's after a few months of new rum, confesses to me afterwards, that it did seem awful hard lines to come down on those poor beggars, just as they were enjoying themselves. But come down on them we do, and with some effect. Johnny's eloquence dries up in a moment, or rather concentrates itself in a fervent invocation or two as he drops bottle and pannikin, and, making one rush for the gangway, tumbles, head foremost, into his dingy, and pulls away for shore, scarcely stopping to rub his shins or curse his luck, and the Midge, and the Shipping Acts, and things in general as he goes. He may pull, though, as hard as he likes; he won't pull himself out of the scrape. The Midge is faster than he is, and buzzes alongside before he has made a dozen strokes; and Johnny's face is recognised and his name booked, and to-morrow morning he'll be had up at the Thames Police Court, and fined twenty pounds or so for boarding a ship without leave from her master, as sure as eggs are eggs, or sharks, sharks.

"And why the—so and so—shouldn't they come aboard?" asks a fine, strapping young A.B., by no means disposed to acquiesce in being thus forcibly rescued from the pleasant paths of perdition and bottled porter. "We've got to go somewhere, I suppose? We shan't get a farthing of pay these three days; you know that well enough, guv'ner; and, if I can't get home, I mean to have a bit of a lark while I'm a-waiting, I can tell you."

Would he have gone straight home if his wages had been paid down? Yes, the young A.B. would, and glad to do it. His old mother has been a good mother to him, and he'd have liked nothing better than to have took the old gal a good lump of money. And so he will, too, as soon as he gets it. He can't do it before, can he? And as for the "old gal" only getting what Johnny and Nan leave of it, why whose fault is that, he'd like to know?

And on the whole it does not seem to be the fault of the young A.B. any more than it is that of the eight or ten others of the crew, who, in reply to Captain Pitman's inquiries, confess—some frankly, some rather shamefacedly, some, it must be owned, a trifle surlily—that if they could but get their wages paid before landing, or even such small portion of them as should suffice to pay the journey, they would be glad enough to give Johnny and Nan, and the whole Highway into the bargain, as wide a berth as ever pilot gave to shoal or breaker, and keep their hard-earned coin for themselves and those dependent on them.

As we board the little Midge, and buzz away upon our course once more, we question our worthy captain as to the meaning of the singular arrangement which authorises shipowners to postpone, for two or three days after the voyage is finally ended, the payment of the crew by whom it has been performed. Captain Pitman is of opinion that the existing law, if enforced by rather more substantial penalties, is quite sufficient to ensure Jack's being paid a proportion of his wages before leaving the ship; and certainly it is not easy, looking at the words of the Act, to understand how any doubt can have arisen as to their intention. Of one thing, at all events, there can be no doubt, and that is, that if this be not the law at present, the sooner it is made law the better.

WHAT HE COST HER.

BY JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGERD," "AT HER MERCY,"
"HALVES," &c.

CHAPTER XXVIII. TWO VISITORS.

A YOUNG gentleman, who weighs fifty thousand pounds in the estimation of good society, cannot be thrown into eight feet of water without making some splash; and it was not long before the rumour of that incident reached Ella's ears. She had not

questioned her husband respecting the details of Mr. Whympers-Hobson's immersion—the subject having been painful to her, as we know, upon a collateral account—nor had he volunteered any description of it; and very much disappointed her friends were upon getting no information on the matter from what they had very naturally considered to be headquarters. Lady Elizabeth Groves called on the very afternoon succeeding the catastrophe, with the ostensible purpose of “hearing all about it from first to last.” As the giver of the entertainment at which the mischance occurred, she deemed it her perquisite and privilege to learn the particulars of it at first hand; and, besides, it was necessary to her dear Julia's interests, as regarded Mr. Whympers-Hobson, that she should take some action in the affair. She was therefore far from pleased, on being shown up into Ella's drawing-room, to find Gracie sitting there with her friend. She had in readiness a number of questions which had been framed for a tête-à-tête interview, and which, if put in the presence of a third person would require modification. She was not a person, however, inclined to alter her plans on account of obstructions that could be swept away by the brush of brusquerie. Indeed, for so great a lady, she was, to say truth, by no means hampered at any time by a too delicate sense of politeness.

After a few words of conventional civility, she at once observed: “I had rather hoped to find you alone this afternoon, my dear Mrs. Landon; as I had something to talk to you about.”

Gracie at once rose from her chair, but Ella, with a rapid gesture, signed to her to remain.

“Gracie Ray is my intimate friend, Lady Elizabeth,” said she, “and is quite cognisant of the matter about which I conclude you wish to speak to me.”

“Oh; she knows about Mr. Whympers-Hobson having been thrown in the water, does she? I think it would have been better to have spoken of that to as few people as possible.”

Poor Gracie looked the picture of astonishment, as well she might, since it was the first time that she had heard of the catastrophe in question.

“She doesn't know about his being thrown into the water,” observed Ella, quietly; “but she knows why it was done.”

“Then be so good as to make me also

your confidante in the matter,” said Lady Elizabeth, promptly. “Why was it done?”

“It was all caused by his meddling with a business that did not concern him,” answered Ella dryly. The application of the remark was unmistakable, and her visitor did not affect to misunderstand it.

“The business, however, whatever it is, is certainly my business,” returned she. “The occurrence happened, I may almost say, under my roof; and, at all events, affected one of my guests. I have a right to demand the particulars of it, Mrs. Landon, and I do demand them.”

“I know nothing more of the matter, Lady Elizabeth, than your nephew told me; and the same source of information is open to you. Mr. Hobson was insolent, I believe, and my husband punished him; but he did not describe to me how it was done.”

“Everybody knows, unfortunately, how it was done, Mrs. Landon. It was a positive mercy that the poor young man was not drowned; in which case, your husband would have been tried for murder. What I wish to know—and have a right to know—is, why it was done? What was the provocation given that could have—I do not say justified—but in any way accounted for, so violent an outrage? You say that Mr. Whympers was insolent—that is a very vague accusation.”

“It is, however, supported by evidence. I understood from your nephew that other gentlemen, besides himself, were witnesses of Mr. Hobson's misconduct.”

“Mr. Whympers-Hobson did not misconduct himself, Mrs. Landon; or, at all events, there are two opinions upon that subject. Whereas, there is no doubt that an attempt was made upon his life.”

“Which is doubtless very valuable,” said Ella scornfully. “In future he will be more careful not to risk it by scandalous and malicious observations.”

“But that is the very point of the whole matter, Mrs. Landon—the question is whether they were scandalous and malicious. I am justified in stating, am I not, that they had reference to the circumstances of your marriage?”

“You are justified in believing it, Lady Elizabeth.”

“And I take leave to say, Mrs. Landon,” answered the other, in a louder key, “justified in much more. For the character of the ladies whom I ask to my house I am answerable to society.”

“Your ladyship must have a considerable responsibility on your shoulders,” answered Ella sweetly.

"She is a regular bad one," thought her ladyship. "Her impudence is shameless." But she only observed with dignity: "Up to yesterday, however, madam, I have never had any cause to regret my good nature. No lady, I repeat, has hitherto entered my doors, on whom the breath of scandal has rested for an instant; whose conduct, whether after or before marriage, cannot bear the strictest investigation."

Her ladyship paused, not so much perhaps for a reply, as in the expectation of some outbreak. If she had been a man, one would have said of her that she enjoyed a "row" rather than otherwise; she was certainly never afraid of one.

But Ella's face showed nothing.

"This account of your friends is very satisfactory, Lady Elizabeth," said she dryly; "indeed, considering their heterogeneous character, one might almost say unexpectedly satisfactory."

The remark was sufficiently irritating, even as it stood, but the "heterogeneous" was too much for her ladyship; if Ella had said a "scratch lot," as others had done, she would have known what it meant, and could have borne it better.

"How dare you say such things of my friends?" cried she, in passionate tones. "You, who I don't believe were ever married at all!"

At this Ella laughed right out; a laugh that was worth fifty protestations of respectability, had not her ladyship been too angry to accept its testimony. Even as it was, however, she saw that there was something in it, and changed her ground.

"If you were married, your husband didn't know it," exclaimed she viciously.

"Gracie," said Ella, in cold grave tones, "be good enough to touch the bell."

"I don't wish to be hard upon you, Mrs. Landon," continued her ladyship, in more conciliatory tones, for she felt that she had gone too far; "but I came here for an explanation, and I must have it. That there was something wrong about your marriage there can be no doubt. It will be better for you to tell me the whole truth. Society——"

Here appeared the footman.

"Show that—lady—out," said Ella. She had been within a hair's breadth of saying "that woman."

Lady Elizabeth was fond of "scenes" and "experiences," but she felt, on her way to the front door, that she had had one experience too many.

"My dearest Ella, what have you done?" exclaimed Gracie, as soon as they were alone.

"Got rid of a friend that was not worth keeping," said Ella. She spoke with cold indifference, but the passion within her, compared with that of her late visitor, was as a Siemen's furnace is to a gas-stove.

"But she has gone away with such an erroneous impression," argued Gracie. "Would it not have been better to tell her the—how the case really stands?"

"Certainly not. She is an impertinent, insolent woman, and I owe her no sort of explanation whatsoever."

"You should know your own affairs best, dear, but you have made an enemy of her, I fear; and she will go about 'saying things,' you may depend upon it."

"No doubt she will. Fortunately everybody knows her, and therefore nobody will believe her—— There's the bell again; another visitor, come, doubtless, upon the same errand. If it is disagreeable to you to see these people, Gracie, don't stay."

"I shall certainly stay," said Gracie, loyally.

"Lady Greene," announced the footman, and in walked a very different visitor from the preceding one. Lady Elizabeth was comparatively young, and still a beauty, though of a mature and Juno-like type. Lady Greene was a little weazened old woman, who might in the good old times have been burnt for a witch.

"How charmingly you look, Ella," cried she, "notwithstanding your fatigues of yesterday? Miss Ray—did you say Ray, Ella?—I am delighted to make your acquaintance; all Ella's friends are my friends, are they not, my dear?"

"We have a pretty large common acquaintance, at all events," said Ella smiling.

"Common enough some of them, eh? Did you ever see such funny people as were at the picnic? That Mr. Rufus Bond, for example?"

"They say he owns half South America," said Ella.

"Does he, indeed? Then he must have a house there somewhere, and I wish he would live upon his property. I didn't think much of Miss Julia's young man that is to be. Did you?"

"I didn't know she had a young man."

"No more she has at present; but Lady Elizabeth has bespoken one for her—Mr. Whymper-Hobson."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ella, with an unexpected touch of interest.

This was the cause, then, of Lady Elizabeth's severity! She had been taking up

the cudgels for her future nephew-in-law, in order to ingratiate herself and her Julia with that young gentleman. Ella had been so full of her own trouble on the day in question that her usually quick observation had failed to detect her hostess's manoeuvres, but now all was plain enough. She had not done her ladyship the injustice of crediting her with a disinterested indignation in the cause of social morality, but had set down her behaviour to mere inquisitiveness.

"Oh yes, she looks upon the affair as good as settled. She has caught him young, you see, before he has felt his wings; and if I had a daughter or a niece I should not envy her her catch. The lad looks to me like a barber's block, though he can't be that, or he would have floated, wouldn't he? My dear Ella, what made that dear delightful husband of yours throw him into Virginia Water?"

Lady Greene was one of those persons whose genuine good nature protects them from the consequences of "naturalness." If you could have said of her without a blush that she always spoke without thinking, and said exactly what she thought, that would accurately have described her character. She had strong opinions, though they had certainly not been induced by reflection; and since Ella had run counter to them she had not hesitated, upon many occasions, to reprove her; nay, as we have seen, she had even spoken to Cecil upon the subject in the most maternal fashion. With most persons who had taken any such liberty Ella would have been very angry, but with Lady Greene's naïveté it was as difficult to be angry, as with the candour of a child. Though Ella was by this time fully cognisant of the hostility she was likely to meet with from Lady Elizabeth on account of this very matter, and of the grave influence it must needs have on her future relations with society, she could not restrain a smile at the point-blank question of the old lady's: "Why did your dear delightful husband put Mr. Whymper-Hobson in the water?"

"He was very impertinent, Lady Greene," said she, "and impertinent to me, which, of course, my husband could not stand."

"That's just what my Frank says." Frank was her nephew in the Guards, who had been one of the guests at the picnic on the previous day. "Hobson was injudicious in selecting Cecil Landon of all men in the world to say unpleasant things to about his wife, and still more foolish to

choose the waterside for the communication."

"Your ladyship and Mr. Greene seem to be already acquainted with the particulars," observed Ella dryly.

The thought that her late confession to her husband had been made the subject of debate by others, even before it had passed her own lips, was very galling to her.

"Of course we are acquainted with them so far, my dear. Everybody knows that Mr. Hobson took upon himself to rally Mr. Landon upon the subject of his marriage, but nobody knows what was queer about it. That it was something more than a runaway match—at all events of the usual kind—is generally agreed. Some say you ran away with Mr. Landon, others say he tried to impose upon you by a mock marriage. Others again go so far as to say——"

"What?" asked Ella; she looked so pale and grim, that the garrulous old dame had suddenly pulled up, in unaccustomed alarm. "What do others again say?" repeated Ella, imperiously.

"Well, my dear Ella, people will say anything, you know, except their prayers. I am not speaking my own ideas upon the subject. Frank says that he will bet five to two that you are as 'straight as a die,' that's his expression. And he is not a young man to bet odds unless he feels almost certain."

"Almost certain, do you mean, Lady Greene, that I am an honest woman?" inquired Ella, speaking very slowly and deliberately.

"Well, no—— There can be no doubt of that, of course. Frank means—— But there, you shall come and dine with us—some day—you and Miss Ray too—and you shall get it all out of him yourself."

To this unpromising proposition Ella did not condescend to reply; but it did not escape her that the invitation—such as it was—was indefinite. Lady Greene was a hospitable old lady, and when she asked folks to dinner was always wont to name her days.

"The fact is," she went on, "so far as Frank is concerned, although he is a staunch friend of yours, my dear, the matter has made the strongest impression upon him in its humorous aspect. He says it was just like his luck to have missed seeing your husband throw Whymper-Hobson in, and then the others throwing the sweep after Whymper-Hobson."

"The sweep!—what sweep?" asked Ella.

"How should I know. A sweep who could swim at all events, and whom they sent in after him like a retriever. I thought Frank would have expired with laughter, when he was talking to me about that sweep."

"I think it must have been an oar," observed Gracie quietly; "a long oar is sometimes called a sweep."

"Is it indeed, my dear?" said her ladyship. "Then that explains what I thought so funny—that they took no trouble about the poor sweep when it was all over, just because he was a poor man, and this Hobson has fifty thousand pounds. He doesn't look like a gentleman to my mind, and Frank says he is a prig, if not a sneak. Now, if he is a sneak, he is not likely to have spoken the truth about your marriage."

"If he said anything which would imply that my marriage was not a valid and a proper one, he told a wicked and malicious lie," said Ella gravely.

"Just so; now that is so perfectly satisfactory. I felt sure it would be so, my dear; and, as I say, Frank even offered to bet five to two upon it. You are not one to deceive an old friend like me, I know—especially when the whole thing must come out sooner or later. I don't quite understand, however, what was a little amiss in the affair, even now. You both married under false names, I believe."

"We did no such thing, Lady Greene, and I cannot permit you, or any other person, to suggest it," said Ella, haughtily.

"Quite right. 'You will find she will stand to her guns,' said my nephew Frank, and so you have done. It is such a relief to my mind that I have your authority to contradict all these rumours." Here she rose from her chair and her hostess rang the bell.

"I have ventured to assert upon my own responsibility, my dear Ella, that your husband has not left town for fear of Mr. Whymper-Hobson taking vengeance upon him."

"I think you may say that much, Lady Greene. I don't think Cecil was ever afraid of anybody."

"Quite so; so courageous and also so affectionate; I don't know a young husband so devoted. It isn't as if he had

got tired of you, as Frank says, in which case he might have cut the painter; taken advantage, he means, of any informality in your marriage contract. Even if it was ever so wrong, you know—especially as you have no children—you have only got to marry again, and there you are. Good morning, my dears, and God bless you."

The blessing escaped Ella's ears, but not the remark that had preceded it, and which wounded all the worse for the lightness of the speaker's tone. She looked like one to whom a blow has been given, and who dares not return it. Now that the occasion for it had departed, all her courage had fled.

"My darling Ella, that good lady meant no harm," said Gracie, consolingly. "If she meant anything, she meant good."

"It is not she that I fear, Gracie; she is but the mouthpiece of others, who have not her good nature. I shall be the target for the public scorn."

"You will live it down, my darling, and that soon, since you have done nothing really wrong—at least nothing such as your enemies would impute to you. It must seem so hard, I know it must, to you who have been so happy."

"No, Gracie, I have not been happy." The tone in which these words were spoken went straight to Gracie's heart.

"But only about this business, Ella, surely," said she, throwing herself on her knees beside her.

"No—there is nothing else, only about this business," answered Ella, with hesitation. "But it was never out of my mind. I knew that this blow must fall some day."

"Poor darling," murmured the other.

"I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." Oh, how true that is, Gracie."

"Yes, it comes from the book of Job. I have known one who suffered as evil things as he did, though of another sort; and who was never rewarded; and yet who did not complain."

Ella knew that Gracie was talking of her mother, but she answered nothing. Her own troubles monopolised her wholly. Moreover, Mrs. Ray was out of the reach of trouble. For the first time in her young life—for even yet she was very young—Ella wished that she was dead likewise.